FALL 1999

NEWS BRIEF

Neighborhood Networks

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Office of Housing-Multifamily
www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org

Neighborhood Networks Initiative Marks 500-Center Milestone

Concept Becomes a Successful Reality

"By equipping people with the skills to participate in the 'information revolution,' Neighborhood Networks is preparing them to take a more active role in our society."

- HUD Secretary Andrew Cuomo

That computer technology will unlock the door to self-sufficiency and economic opportunity was the concept behind Neighborhood Networks as U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) planners envisioned the initiative four years ago.

Now four years later, the concept has become a successful reality. The initiative has broadened dramatically, responding to residents of HUD-assisted and/or -insured housing communities nationwide with programs and services in the areas of education, health care, social services, employment, transportation and child care. In July, a celebration of 500 centers in operation marked the initiative's presence in every corner of the nation. More than 700 more centers are in development.

"For individuals, Neighborhood Networks centers are an assurance of opportunity for a better life. For our nation, centers play an important role in our national economy," said HUD Assistant Secretary William Apgar. "Centers are valuable because although America is enjoying its greatest economic recovery in recent history, segments of our population still remain left behind."

Those "left behind" were moved to the fore when HUD examined its housing portfolio several years ago.

"In looking at our housing portfolio, it became apparent that one important but overlooked investment was in people. While the department spent decades financing and rehabilitating properties, we did not invest in those who were living in them," said Nicolas Retsinas, director, Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University and former HUD assistant secretary for housing/federal housing commissioner. "In 1995, we changed that by

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Centers Underscore Need for a Computer-Savvy America

Brooklyn's Starrett at Spring Creek is like a colossal city within a city. An estimated 20,000 New Yorkers live in 21-story apartment buildings so tall they seem to break the clouds. This is the nation's largest rental housing development, so large that its ethnic and economic mix make it a microcosm of America.

Here, the Starrett Information Technology and Education Center, a Neighborhood Networks center, recently opened at this U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-assisted property. Pentium II PC's—25 of them—are humming, each one equipped with a CD ROM. There are scanners, color printers and Internet access and programs and activities planned around them for residents of every age. Center organizers know the statistics and the implications

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Grove Neighbohood Network Center, Greeley, Colo., Technical Online Service Coordinator Thom Mahoney (center) accepts a HUD Best Practices Award from Saul Ramirez, Jr., HUD Deputy Secretary (left) and William Apgar, HUD Assistant Secretary for Housing/Federal Housing Commissioner.

See story inside...

Neighborhood Networks News Brief *is a quarterly publication for public and private partners and supporters.*

From Across America

Stakeholders Affirm Neighborhood Networks' Future

More than 1,000 Neighborhood Networks stakeholders from across the nation convened at HUD's 1999 Best Practices and Technical Assistance Symposium where they came to learn, network, accept awards and celebrate a milestone — the opening of 500 Neighborhood Networks centers. The conference featured technical tracks on workforce development, center development, sustainability, communications and marketing, partnership development and leadership training.

HUD's Henry Colonna, Neighborhood Networks Senior Resident Initiatives Specialist; Anne Kizzier, Louisiana Multifamily Program Center Director; and Charles Famuliner, Neighborhood Networks National Field Director, unveil Neighborhood Networks' new look.

Acknowledging the success of the initiative, HUD named Neighborhood Networks among a select group of 100 "Best Practices."

In a speech at the gathering, William C. Apgar, HUD Assistant Secretary for Housing/Federal Housing Commissioner, shared his insights about the importance of Neighborhood Networks centers in communities nationwide. In recognition of the 500-center milestone, he presented certificates to Devorah Fong, Director of Public Affairs and Community Relations at Starrett at Spring Creek, Brooklyn, N.Y., and Deborah Van Amerongen, Director of Multifamily Housing for HUD's New York Hub. With 20,000 residents, Starrett is the largest HUD property in the nation.

"Neighborhood Networks centers are improving the lives of individuals throughout America. At the

Neighborhood Networks centers, like We Care Center in Virginia Beach, Va., used an exhibit to describe their center's activities.

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Neighborhood Networks Wins Best Practices Awards

Neighborhood Networks was named one the nation's leading community development programs, winning 16 local and national Best Practices awards at Building a Better Tomorrow, HUD's Best Practices and Technical Assistance Symposium. HUD Secretary Andrew Cuomo called these winners the "best of the best" in community development practice.

The national Neighborhood Networks initiative was selected for the important role it plays in helping residents achieve economic self-sufficiency. Montgomery Townhouses Neighborhood Networks Center in Philadelphia, Pa., Gateway at Edgewood Terrace in Washington, D.C., and the nonprofit Common-Bond of St. Paul, Minn., which operates several Neighborhood Networks centers, were also among the top 100.

The Gateway @ Edgewood Terrace in Washington, D.C. was among the award-winning Neighborhood Networks centers. Shown are Saul Ramirez Jr., HUD Deputy Secretary; Albert Browne, Vice President, Community Preservation and Development Corp. who accepted the award; Leslie A. Steen, President, Community Preservation and Development Corp.; William Apgar; and Karen Miller, Secretary Representative, HUD.

These centers and consortia also received 1999 Best Practices recognition:

- Grove Neighborhood Network, Greeley, Colo.
- Eastwood Neighborhood Networks Learning Center, Chicago, Ill.
- Communities Online (Orchard Mews Apartments), Baltimore, Md.
- LSS Neighborhood Networks Computer Center, Buffalo, N.Y.

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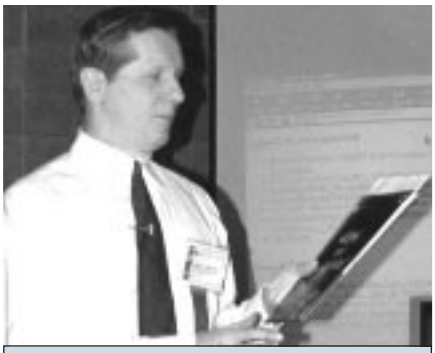
Stakeholders, *Continued from page 2*

same time, they are revitalizing communities and building a strong national economy," Apgar said, "and that benefits everyone."

Other key speakers were Reba Cook, HUD Acting Associate Deputy Assistant Secretary for Multifamily Housing, who inspired the crowd with examples of how residents and communities are benefiting from Neighborhood Networks centers, and Herman Ransom, HUD's Kansas City Multifamily Housing Hub Director, who presented inspirational personal experiences working with residents at Neighborhood Networks centers.



John German of Non-Profit Computing, Inc., in N.Y., presented the workshop, "Identifying Resources on the Internet."

Resident Successes

Speaker John Henry Gregory, President and CEO, Greenbrier Enrichment Center in Columbus, Ohio, lauded residents who had "beat all the odds to achieve success."

Residents **Stephanie Thompson, Communities Online, Baltimore; Kate Cotter, St. Peter Manor, Memphis, Tenn.; Michelle Noreikis, La Grave Learning Center, Grand Forks, Calif., Linda Brown, University Canyon, San Diego, Calif., and Abraham Mengistu, Maggie Gibson, Portland, Ore.**, shared their personal success stories about learning essential computer skills, getting jobs, earning college degrees and sharing their knowledge with others, and praised the initiative for providing them with opportunity. More than 40 residents from around the country participated in focus groups designed to help evaluate and improve the initiative.

For more information, call the Neighborhood Networks Information Center toll-free at (888) 312-2743 or visit the website at www.neighborhoodnetworks.org.

Best Practices Awards, *continued from page 2*

- Neighborhood Networks Center at Heritage Park in Elmira, N.Y., and Stewart Park in Corning, N.Y.
- Friendship Village Community Technology Center, Virginia Beach, Va.
- Germano Millgate Neighborhood Networks Learning Center, Chicago, Ill.
- Englewood Garden Apartments Neighborhood Networks Center, Chicago, Ill.
- Fox View's Career and Computer Center, Carpentersville, Ill.
- Hawthorne Village Apartments Neighborhood Networks Center, Moscow, Idaho
- Houston Neighborhood Networks, Inc. (consortium), Houston, Texas
- Washington State Neighborhood Networks Consortium, Seattle, Wash.

Newswatch

The Nation's Cities Weekly, a trade publication published by the National League of Cities, reported in September on the Neighborhood Networks initiative reaching more than 500 centers in operation.

As part of an article featuring local HUD Best Practices winners, ***The Washington Post*** in August highlighted The Gateway @ Edgewood Terrace at Edgewood Terrace Apartments in northeast Washington, D.C.

The Christian Science Monitor in July spotlighted the Neighborhood Networks center at Edgewood Terrace and the Neighborhood Networks initiative as part of a larger article on the use of computers in the "war against poverty." In addition, ***Federal Computer Week*** showcased Neighborhood Networks in a piece about closing the "digital divide."

Inside Technology Training, a monthly trade magazine, highlighted the Neighborhood Networks initiative in a May article about community technology centers. Also in May, the ***Baltimore Sun***, the weekly ***Baltimore Chronicle*** and the NBC TV affiliate ***WBAL-TV 11***, featured stories on the grand opening of the Neighborhood Networks center at Cherrydale Apartments in Baltimore. An April story in the daily ***Chicago Defender*** noted the grand opening of the Neighborhood Networks center at Parkway Gardens in Chicago.

Milestone, *Continued from page 1*

creating Neighborhood Networks."

Once the population was targeted, the next focus was on ways to meet their needs. "It was clear the world was moving in the direction of the information revolution and that residents of HUD housing were being left farther and farther behind. We believed that computers and technology were the bridge that would connect them to the larger community," Retsinas said.

Diana Goodwin-Shavey, vice president/HUD housing group at CB Richard Ellis, an international real estate advisory and brokerage firm, and the first Neighborhood Networks national field director, explained that the climate was right when the initiative started.

"It was becoming clear that if education didn't become part of everyone's thinking, especially as welfare-to-work and mark-to-market housing were evolving, we were not going to have real estate that had any continued value unless the people living there had jobs and a sense of belonging to the community," Goodwin-Shavey said. "Computers were a way to bridge the digital divide in low income communities and provide opportunities for education. When we went out into communities, we were told that Neighborhood Networks was the best thing HUD had done in 20 years."

Goodwin-Shavey sees Neighborhood Networks centers — and their computers — as an integral component of daily living. "When the Federal Housing Administration started out, people didn't put refrigerators into their homes. Now, they are a necessity. Now, too, computers have become part of the living environment."

Today, broad programmatic opportunities are complementing the initiative's initial focus, said Charles Famuliner, the national field director for Neighborhood Networks. "While all centers share a common philosophy, each one develops independently so that the programs and services they offer reflect the desires, and needs, of their residents. Centers develop their own formula for success and it's working."

Computer Savvy, *Continued from page 1*

of the imbalance between the "haves and the have nots" when it comes to computers.

"It's really a magnet because [the center] can be so many things to so many different people. It brings different people together and it can answer almost everyone's needs. That is really the underpinning of our center," said Devorah Fong, vice president for public affairs at Starrett at Spring Creek.

"Because of the incredible size of Starrett at Spring Creek, its new Neighborhood Networks center makes an important statement about the need for a computer-literate America," said Charles Famuliner, national field director for Neighborhood Networks.

Despite the concentration of people, apartment dwellers can feel isolated regardless of how close they live to one another, Fong said. "Cultural isolation is just one area where residents may feel alone," she said. Therefore, the center is developing a broad spectrum of programs and activities. For instance, to reduce feelings of isolation among Starrett's large Russian population, computers are connecting immigrants to their culture, homeland, friends and relatives.

Teaching children how to use a computer is an important programming component at Starrett Information Technology and Education Center.

Fong emphasized the value of her Neighborhood Networks center in terms of its usefulness to an amazingly diverse population. Serving 20,000 residents, the center has plans in place and more underway for children and youth, adults, job seekers and the elderly. Fulfilling the Neighborhood Networks philosophy about the value of computers in society, the Starrett center offered a computer "camp" for children this summer and for adults, and Pace University's Community Technology Center offers certificate courses in a number of popular software programs. Partnerships with Pace and organizations such as the Jewish Agency for Services for the Aged enable the center to provide programs and activities. "Partnership building is a very important component to building our center," Fong said.

"These centers are helping children become better students, providing parents and adults access to job skills, child care and transportation, and providing other important services that help senior citizens build their personal independence," Famuliner said.

CENTER NEWSLINE

Pioneer Centers are Models for Sustainability

In May 1996, two Neighborhood Networks centers in Louisiana were among the first in the nation to open. These early centers in New Orleans and Marrero have expanded and flourished, emerging as successful models for other Neighborhood Networks centers.

Antonio Gibson remembers the day the Versailles Arms Community Technology Center in New Orleans opened its doors more than three years ago. At first, many residents were curious about the eight computers at the center, but most were afraid to test the new technology, said Gibson, the center director for job development.

"The center generated real excitement but it took some effort to get residents comfortable with computers," Gibson said. "The last three years, we have made a lot of progress in reaching out to residents and it is paying off. Today, children and adults are constantly using the computers to improve their skills and accomplish their goals."

Obtaining a high school diploma is important to residents at the Versailles Learning Center where GED classes are offered.

Trenzetta Barabin, a resident at Versailles Arms Apartments, was one of the center's success stories.

In 1996, Barbarin had been unemployed for four years when she enrolled in computer classes at the center. Soon, she progressed from center volunteer to part-time receptionist to full-time clerk and, eventually, to full-time computer instructor. Her achievements enabled her to become a homeowner.

Barbarin isn't the center's only success story. Here are others:

- More than 100 residents found employment after completing computer training.
- One resident graduated from college and coordinated a VISTA/America Reads Program at the center.
- Dozens of residents participated in the pre-GED program and a Homework Club for children.

The Versailles Arms Community Technology Center now has 20 computers and provides Internet access. It has also obtained its nonprofit status, broadening its potential number of supporters. The center is funded by HUD, the City of New Orleans, Children's Trust Fund, United Way and the Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement. A HUD Drug Elimination grant funds a substance abuse coordinator. With a staff of eight, the center provides an array of services, such as GED preparation, job placement, parenting classes, homework assistance, computer training, drug prevention, family advocacy and employment training.

In May 1996, 10 residents at the Villa D'Ames Apartments in Marerro were the first to take computer classes at the Foundations for Freedom Learning Center, which was then equipped with eight computers. "The first residents who walked into the center were really excited and that enthusiasm remains strong today," said Cheryl Magee, center director.

Today, the number of computers has doubled, another computer room has been added and onsite child care is available.

HUD Neighborhood Networks NEWS BRIEF

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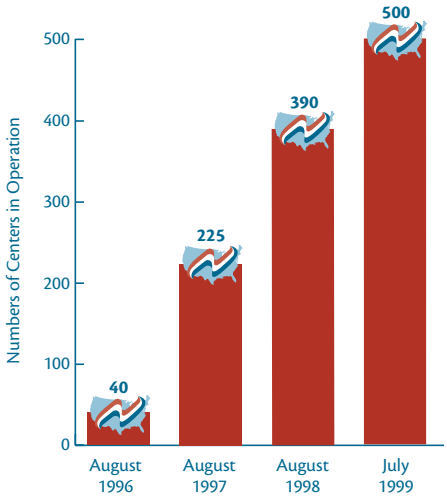
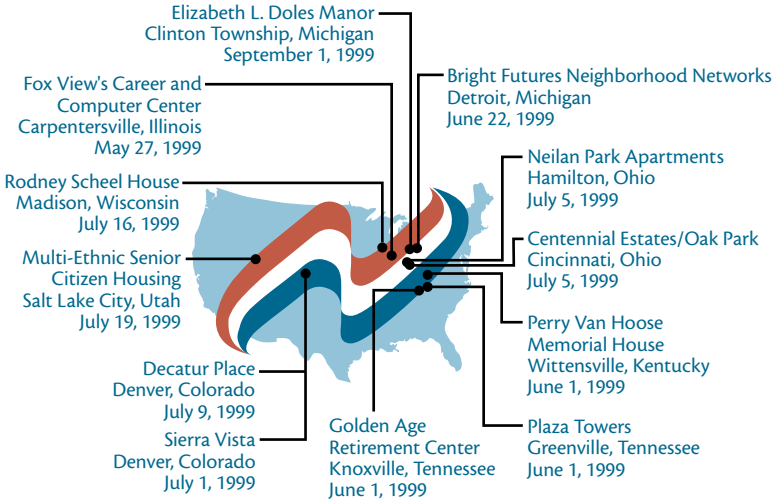
Neighborhood Networks Centers in Operation



There are now more than 500 Neighborhood Networks centers located in HUD-assisted and/or -insured housing nationwide. Among recent centers to open are:



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